

## ABSTRACT

**THESIS:** Learning Through Leadership: Hall Council Executive Board Student Leaders' Reflections on their Leadership Development

**Student:** Bradford Peace

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Leadership development for undergraduate students in higher education is an important learning outcome which can influence their experiences while in college and their employment and post-graduate lives. Despite its position as a common leadership development experience, especially for first-year students, little research exists about how to improve outcomes of participation in hall councils which are programming and advocacy organizations led by students within residence halls. In this study, I interviewed seven members of Ball State University hall councils to understand what factors influenced their development and how they felt their involvement changes their overall university experience. I conducted this study using a phenomenological approach in seeking to understand the students' lived experiences and a common phenomenon which was leadership development through hall council. I recorded, transcribed, and coded the interviews to identify and analyze the common themes which students addressed. Students talked about the importance of their hall council advisor challenging and supporting their development, and relationships with peers as a source for better understanding others. Students talked about developing key skills such as time management and conflict management through meetings as an Executive Board, with their advisor, and through

programming initiatives. Interestingly, the students talked about how much they learned from the organization's shortcomings and how their communication and teamwork skills could be developed through these challenges. Finally, these perspectives, in conjunction with other research, provide insights about how staff can best aid hall council leadership development by helping students to create the experiences that will best help them reach their goals.